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CONSOLIDATED PLAN PUBLIC HEARING

June 18, 2009

My name is Stuart Hersh and I am a retired City employee. Like most Austinites, I rent. First, I want to thank Mayor Wynn and Mayor Pro-Tem McCracken for your years of service and for your support of S.M.A.R.T. Housing zoning requests when voting with opponents would have been the easier course to take. You have my gratitude.

Second, I want to thank City staff for listening to all of us who urged increased support for Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) as a tool to get to deeper levels of affordability for renters. I hope we can straighten out the problems with local guidelines that have created impediments to our making this TBRA resource available to as many low income renters as possible. We want to help out as stakeholders if we can.

Here are areas of concern in the Con Plan and 2009-2010 Action Plan and proposed City budget:

1. \$850,000 in Housing Trust Fund (HTF) will not be spent in the current fiscal year and will be carried forward to next year. For shovel-ready rental projects, this will be as if you approved the staff recommendation last summer to abolish the HTF altogether.
2. There is no new money for the HTF in the Con Plan. The suggestion to use money from 9/7/00 Council Resolution and from repaid S.M.A.R.T. Housing fee waivers and other program income has been rejected apparently.
3. There will be no General Fund support for S.M.A.R.T. Housing staff or the S.M.A.R.T. Review Team in the Con Plan if proposed cuts are approved.
4. The proposed menu of budget cuts indicates that 13,567 completed housing units met S.M.A.R.T. Housing standards in the last 7 years, and 6,545 (48%) of these homeownership and rental units were affordable.
5. This means that S.M.A.R.T. Housing non-profit and for-profit partners have built about 2,000 housing units per year that met Green Building standards and city safety standards; were more accessible than market-rate housing; and were transit-oriented.
6. This also means that 1,000 additional homes and apartments that met S.M.A.R.T. Housing affordability standards became available each year.
7. The current Con Plan draft suggests that the number of S.M.A.R.T. Housing completed units will drop from 3,473 in 2007-2008 to 750 in 2009-2010, a 78% decrease in housing that is S.M.A.R.T. We can not let this happen when the Market Study clearly documents our need to provide more affordable housing.
8. Let's fix the Con Plan problems together over the next few weeks, and use 21st Century tools to solve our 21st Century housing challenges. Yes, we can.

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